

PROCESSED

AUG 21 2002

STU LIBRARY

LutheranWoman

September 2002

TODAY

\$2.00



God and Chaos, Faith and Healing
All Who Are Thirsty, Come!

God's Disaster Response
Transforming Mud





EDITORS' NOTE & LETTERS

Dear Readers,

Thank you for the thoughtful comments and feedback in response to recent *LWT* issues. Letters regarding "Forgotten Sisters in Palestine" (Jan/Feb) continue to trickle in as we all watch and pray for peace in the Middle East. Sharing hope with young Maasai women (March) has triggered a wealth of letters and contributions. Look for more details about the amazing response to this article and other good news in the October issue. Reading about "Christian Yoga" (April) appealed to many who desire to blend mind, body, and soul.

Bearing testament to the fact that we found your funny bone, many wrote to express their delight at the words of Marilyn Olson Belgum (May). What a wonderful gift she has shared with us—the ability to laugh when we need it most. We are pleased to tell you that she is putting together another article for the October issue—something special we can look forward to together. —the editors

Letters

What a fantastic publication. The May issue of *LWT*—just read it from cover to cover. Great reading. I couldn't put it down! Hope Marilyn Belgum will be a regular. May God bless you as you continue to put out *LWT* for us to enjoy.

Sincerely,

Marjorie Leipzig—Poy Sippi, Wisconsin

Hello,

I just finished reading your May 2002 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* and again enjoyed it. You have many inspiring writers.

This issue featured an article written by Marilyn Olson Belgum (Gold, Frankincense, and Mirth). What a talented writer she is. I laughed through it all! Each of us experiences "down days" and a good belly laugh can relax us and lift our spirits. I'd love to see

an article from her every month in your magazine. We are too serious and need to laugh at ourselves more often.

Thank you for making my day!

Muriel Beaulier—Iron Mountain, Michigan

Northern Great Lakes Synod, Our Savior's Lutheran Church

Thank you for "Gold, Frankincense, and Mirth." Almost 10 years have passed since I last laughed with Marilyn Olson Belgum, at the 100th Anniversary Celebration/Reunion of the Walther League in Chicago. What a blessing is this wise, witty, wonderful woman. May she continue for a long time to hold forth—or third—allowing for some slowdown and make every day a happy Mirthday!

Sincerely, and for lots more laffs,

Olive Wise-Spannaus—Seattle, Washington

Subscription questions? See page 43. **Send letters to the editor to:** *Lutheran Woman Today*, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4183; email to: lwt@elca.org. Please include your name, city, and state on all correspondence. *LWT* publishes letters representative of those received on a given subject. Letters may be edited for space. Letters must be signed, but requests for anonymity will be honored.



16



24



12

DEPARTMENTS

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 7 SEPTEMBER 2002

2 Editors' Note and Letters

4 Give Us This Day

15 Reader Call

19 IdeaNet

20 Mothering Seasons

28 Bible Study

Grace upon Grace:

A STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

40 Grace Notes

42 Amen!

43 Directory of Reader Services

Refurbishments and Fix-ups *Marj Leegard*

What Faith Question Have You Had to Deal With After the Events of September 11, 2001?

How Do You Reach Out to God's Children of All Ages?

Through Our Children's Eyes *Kirsi Stjerna*

Session 1: All Who Are Thirsty, Come! Jesus' first act of public ministry in John is to change water into wine judged "the best." His last act is to lay down his life, an even more extravagant sign that reveals the love of Jesus and the glory of God. We look at how these signs demonstrate Jesus' extravagance in providing for others and his unrestrained demonstration of God's glory. *Mary Hinkle*

An introduction to Women of the ELCA's new executive director. *Linda Post Bushkofsky*

Taming the Chaos *Catherine Malotky*

Valuable information for every reader.

CHAOS AND GOD

6 God & Chaos, Faith & Healing

Some of life's greatest insights can emerge from the deepest valleys. Former presiding bishop Chilstrom reflects on some of his darkest days and shares his thoughts. *Herbert W. Chilstrom*

12 Chaos as a Creative Opportunity

God created the world out of chaos and is still doing it. But how much chaos can we stand? And when does it spawn destruction rather than creativity? *Robert Fite*

16 Transforming Mud: A Memorial for the Missing

How do you visualize thousands of lives? A story about creative exercise that helped the Muhlenburg College community work through their feelings and responses to September 11, 2001. *Scott Sherk*

22 Being in Control: Reality or Illusion?

Life is filled with disappointments, detours, and tragedies. They range from the mundane to the profound. Do we really have any control over all this? *Clare La Plante*

24 God's Disaster Response

"God is in control." "It's the end of time." "Everything happens for a reason; God has everything mapped out." What is our answer to this armchair theology? What is God's will in the terrible chaos of our day? *Linda Daniels-Block*

PLUS . . .

5 Finding Peace

Overwhelmed by life and all that it brings? These simple suggestions can help break the barriers that sometimes serve to keep us from God's peace. *Kay L. Stewart*

11 Prayer Cards

A Sunday school lesson that really scored! *Sheri Lee Sears*

35 Project Hope

Making appropriate choices can help us follow God's will for all creatures. *Danielle Welliever*

36 Teaching What One Most Needs to Learn

A group of authors recently spent a year compiling a book about prayer. This contributor tells what she learned along the journey. *P.K. McCary*

39 Argentinian Christians Share True Riches

Out of financial chaos, opportunities arise to share good news of greater treasure than can be found in banks. *Mercedes Garcia Bachmann*

Editor Nancy Goldberger Managing Editor Deb Bogaert Copy Editor Audrey Novak Riley Editorial Assistant Beth McBride Intern Emily Johnson Art Direction On Track Visual Communications Cover Shari Imbo Swartz

Lutheran Woman Today (ISSN 0896-209X), a magazine for growth in faith and mission, is published 10 times a year by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in partnership with Augsburg Fortress (Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440). Lutheran Woman Today editorial offices are at 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Copyright © 2002 Women of the ELCA. All rights reserved. Duplication in whole or in part in any form is prohibited without written permission from the publisher. Printed in U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn., and additional mailing offices. **Annual subscriptions:** ELCA members, \$11.00; non-ELCA, \$13.00; outside North America add \$6 for postage. Single copies, \$2.00. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Lutheran Woman Today, Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, Box 1816, Danbury, CT 06813-1816.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Refurbishments and Fix-ups

by Marj Leegard

IN ECCLESIASTES 12, THERE IS A DESCRIPTION THAT SEEMS PERTINENT TO MANY OF US. "SOMEDAY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON AND THE STARS WILL ALL SEEM DIM TO YOU. RAIN CLOUDS WILL REMAIN OVER YOUR HEAD. YOUR BODY WILL GROW FEEBLE. Your teeth will decay, and your eyesight fail. . . . Your hair will turn as white as almond blossoms. . . . You will feel lifeless and drag along like an old grasshopper."

Sometimes my house attains such a state, too. I dream of new floor coverings here, curtains there, some sanding and refinishing. I try all the ways I can to get my body past its signs of deterioration and then take up the matter of the house.

When I imagined a fix-up in the bathroom, I believed it could be done in one day. Indeed the man said as much. So we went off to North Dakota to speak to a Women of the ELCA group and returned home at 10:00 that night to find the toilet sitting in the hall. We have one bathroom. We never thought we needed two!

This is the ultimate of chaos in housekeeping. There was a part that was needed. We called our grandson who knows where to buy things at odd hours. In an hour, things were back to normal.

I think about God looking about, God's spirit moving over the waters. There were in the vast spaces of the universe all the colors needed for butterflies and bluebirds. All the shapes for kittens and elephants. All the sounds of thunder and a baby's first laugh. All the

tastes of strawberries and tea. The feel of soft fur and cold water. The smell of cinnamon and rose petals. Maybe God decided that something could be made from all the possibilities. Do you think God planned some things for eons and some for a day? Could God have created order in the universe and then created my ancestors and me? And you?

If we are immersed in the news bulletins and moved to tears by the suffering in the world, we see chaos. But Creator God has given to us, we who are made in God's image, creative powers that can be used for much more than refurbishing floor coverings in our homes. The world and God's children need our loving care. Peace must have a chance if the children will have the gift of life in this world. Remodeling plans? Everyone has a place to make right. Of course it will be uncomfortable in the doing. We already know that. We have gone through refurbishing before.

The world is a larger scale of the small truths. If we waste, someone will go hungry. If we are greedy, someone will suffer. If we dirty our place in the world, someone will have to live in chaos.

The singer in Ecclesiastes only sings the first verse. We are new creatures! From chaos, let us make the world new again.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

FINDING PEACE

by Kay L. Stewart

IT IS DIFFICULT NOT TO FEEL UNREST THESE DAYS. Our sense of security has been shattered; our faith is being tried. No matter where we look in the world, it seems we see turmoil.

Feeling at peace in the midst of atrocities can be difficult, but peace is there. We can feel that peace when we turn away from our own worries and open our hearts and lives to God. God's word affirms the peace God provides us. Through God's word we can find ways to get beyond the barrier of our worries to feel the presence of God.

Following are some scriptures that direct us to the path of peace. After each verse are some suggestions on how to apply the message to your life, to reclaim peace.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

(John 14:27)

Place a cross or other sacred image near your television. When disturbing news or images appear, look at the cross as a reminder that the power of the Lord is much greater than any evil in the world.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)

Go outside. Find a quiet place and listen to the singing birds, the rustling leaves, the chattering squirrels. Look at the beauty around you. Smell the air. Feel the Holy Spirit in the wind and allow the Spirit to fill you with peace and reassurance.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

(Psalm 4:8)

Can't sleep? Bundle up, go outside, and look into the night sky. Gaze at the stars shining down on you. Look at the moon. Even if the sky is hidden behind the clouds, you know the stars and moon are there. They have been above you and your family since the day your lives began. So has God. Take comfort in knowing this, and get some sleep.

The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

(Romans 14:18-19)

With the power of the Holy Spirit within you, do something! Contribute to charity, offer your services to your community, pray for all those affected by war and unrest. Do as the Spirit guides you. Share the peace of our Lord!

With the Lord's message of peace in mind, May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Amen.

Kay L. Stewart is a registered dietitian and a member of Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bergton, Va. She is editor of her congregation's monthly newsletter, *Signpost*.

IT WAS A STRANGE REQUEST. Most groups want an upbeat message about how to succeed, how to avoid the pitfalls of life, how to keep a smile on your face when life gets difficult. This was different. “We’d like you to speak about those times in your life when God seemed distant, when you wondered how you’d make it through a crisis.”

GOD & CHAOS FAITH & HEALING

by Herbert W. Chilstrom

As I reflected on that invitation, many moments of darkness and doubt came to mind. Two of them, however, were especially long-lasting and stressful.

I was born into a family of eight children, six girls and two boys. David, my only brother, was born two years after me. Being so close in age, I didn’t realize until I was four or five years old that he was different. A brain injury at the time of his birth would leave him challenged for life. Each year brought the growing realization that the ordinary things most of us do would be difficult for him. Telling time, making change, playing ball, and adding numbers all took David longer to do than the rest of us. Our family surrounded him with love and formed a protective circle around him. When other children were mean to him, I defended him, even getting into fistfights.

In the 1940s, special education classes were unknown in most school systems. That meant that children like David had to be sent to state-operated schools, often in distant cities. I will never forget the day. Because my father could not get off work, I rode with my mother and the county social worker as we took David to the school, some 150 miles away. The superintendent was a very kindly gentleman, but when he announced that it was time for us to leave, David broke into heavy sobs. My mother tried to keep her composure, but the tears flowed. I wanted to be strong. I held back the tears.

As we rode those long miles toward home, I could feel my mother’s trembling body beside me in the back seat. Mile after mile she cried. Other than her sobs, there was silence. The hard lump in my throat made it impossible for me to speak.



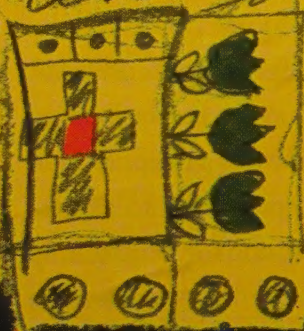
FAITH AND HEALING



Faith and Healing



Faith and Healing



Why?
And?

In the months that followed, I continued to try to be brave and strong. But when I went to bed at night, the tears flowed freely. Along with the tears there were deep, hard questions. "Why?" I wondered. "Why do these things happen? And why David? Why didn't it happen to me instead of him?" And, most of all, "Where is God in all of this?"

Answers did not come quickly or easily. In time, however, I began to grapple with the deepest and most mysterious questions of all. "Why evil? Does God have no power to intervene? Why pray at all? Can God feel my pain?" It was in the midst of those dark nights of the soul that I began to understand what lies at the heart of our Christian Gospel: It is the Good News that God comes to us in Christ in this broken world.

Christ takes upon himself our suffering and anguish. I even began to see that God often works good purposes from what seems only evil at the time.

David eventually returned to our home and the community. He has been able to do productive work, including custodial service at the retirement complex where he now lives. He has a deep, vibrant faith. His simple trust in God puts mine to shame. He speaks easily and freely about his relationship with Christ. Again and again he has witnessed to me, helping me to understand what it means to live with a sense of the presence of Christ in one's life.

And then there is that other dark valley. My life will be forever an open wound because of the day we found our youngest son Andrew after he had taken his own life. Everything came to an abrupt

halt. Every hope, dream, and aspiration we had for him slipped away in his moment of final despair.

From the day we brought him home from the adoption agency, we knew this was a very special boy. So bright, so loving, so full of good humor, so agile, so handsome, so gregarious. We would do anything and everything to make life full and challenging for him.

How could he have descended into such a slough of despair, culminating with that tragic decision during his first year of college?

Again, those questions. "Where is God in all this? Why didn't we see it coming? And if he kept his despair from us, why didn't others see it? How could he have given up on such a promising life?

And why didn't God intervene to stop this horrible tragedy?"

Anger, guilt, confusion. Envy of other families that suddenly seemed so ideal. Despair over having invested so much love and care in his young life,

only to have it end in such calamity. I wondered how I could go on with a normal life after everything had been shattered for him and for us. I was a synod bishop at the time. When I stepped into a pulpit, I felt like there was a sign hanging around my neck that read, "Failure!"

Early one morning, I set out for my daily walk. A maelstrom of feelings was roiling inside me. I felt enormous guilt, wondering what I might have done to prevent his death. But I also felt anger at him, wondering how he could have made such a foolish, senseless decision.

Suddenly, I stopped in my tracks. I looked up

In time, I began to grapple with the deepest and most mysterious questions of all. "Why evil? Does God have no power to intervene?"

and spoke out loud. "Andrew," I said, "I love you. And I know you love me. I forgive you. And I know you forgive me."

As I continued walking that morning, I thought of all the sorrowing and troubled people I had counseled over the years. I had assured them that no matter how deep their grief, no matter how profound their loss, God would not abandon them. "Now," I said to myself, "you need to speak that word to yourself. If the Gospel is true, then it must be true for you as well as for others."

By the time I returned home, some of the dark clouds had begun to lift, if only slightly. Though the pain will persist for the rest of my life, that morning was a turning point for me. Somehow, I knew that by the grace of God, I would make it.

What have I learned from these valleys of the shadow?

I have learned that we live in a sinful, broken world. How I wish it were otherwise, especially when it affects me so directly. But there is no escape.

Sooner or later, all will be touched by some form of evil; all will come to moments of crisis and despair. Joseph Bvumbwe, presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Malawi, Africa, spoke to an American audience shortly after the September 11 disaster. Coming from a land of enormous suffering and chaos, he looked at us and said, "This world is a dangerous place. You may not have known it."

I have learned that I can shake my fist at God. I once wondered why the book of Psalms includes some that express anger, not just at evil, but also at God. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" (Psalm 22:1). The psalmist—and later our Lord Jesus himself—is not railing at evil in general, but at God, very God of very God. How can one do this? Because God is big enough to

absorb all the anger we want to vent. Much better to get it out than to bury our rage where it will only cause repressed anger, depression, and possible harm to ourselves or others.

I have learned that God does not abandon us at those times. Some embrace a theology of glory, believing that if we just try hard enough, believe fervently enough, pray sincerely enough, God will keep us from evil. When calamity comes, those who hold these views often collapse into doubt, depression, and bitterness that can last a lifetime.

Beginning with my struggles over my brother David's limitations, I realized that the secret is not to think that we will escape evil but to believe that God comes to us in the most impossible situations in life and suffers with us. I learned later that some call this the theology of the cross.

I have learned that in spite of this Good News, we will be sad. A dear friend learned that she had inoperable cancer. Over the next year we watched as her health declined and her life became more and more limited. One day, the physician asked her husband if he wanted medication to deal with depression as he watched the disease take its toll on the one he loved so much. "No," he replied, "I don't think you understand. I'm not depressed. I just feel very, very sad." Job loss, divorce, failure, illness, death—any crisis can bring despair. I worry about those who say, "No problem, I'm doing just fine. Don't worry about me. I'll be all right." Better to acknowledge our sadness, honestly and openly. Such candor may save us from clinical depression.

I have learned the importance of maintaining good habits that were in place before the crisis came. For me, that included having devotions at the breakfast table with my wife every morning. No, I didn't feel like it in the wake of Andrew's death, but I knew I needed it. There were days when the scriptures seemed to have

no message for me. But, inevitably, the day would come when exactly the right word leaped from the page and brought comfort and hope to my soul. I also learned that when I could not pray, the hymns and prayers of the church, forged over the centuries by saints of God who had often suffered worse calamities than mine, helped me to pray. Instead of brooding over my loss during my morning walks or the long hours of the night, I sang hymns and recited scripture that I had committed to memory.

I have learned the importance of maintaining good health habits while in crisis. There is an intimate link between body and soul. Exercise and a balanced diet are essential to good mental and spiritual well-being.

I have learned in times of crisis that I need the Christian community more than ever. As word of Andrew's death spread, our Christian friends surrounded us with care and understanding. Food, phone calls, letters, helpful books—they came as a flood. I still recall vividly some of those calls, some of those jars of soup. For months we read and re-read some of the most helpful letters. I treasure the memory of those who came to me and said, “I understand. My brother took his own life, too.” “I think I know what your son went through. I nearly ended it all when I was his age.” I have often asked, “How can anyone survive a deep crisis without the love of a Christian community?”

I have learned that I need word and sacrament more than ever in times of crisis. It is tempting to withdraw, even from those places that are most helpful. Some stay away from church for months. They may

not want others to see their tears. They may feel shame if there has been a death by suicide or if a marriage has ended in divorce. What we all learn at those times, however, is that there is nothing more helpful than to sit among our fellow believers and hear, now in a new and fresh way, the “old, old story of Jesus and his love.” And now the Lord's Supper takes on a perspective that may have eluded us until now. We now look around the congregation and see that others have also suffered, often more severely. We are not alone. This is a meal for the community, for all those who hunger for grace that not only forgives sins, but also gives strength to move on.

We now look around the congregation and see that others have also suffered, often more severely. We are not alone.

More than 600 years ago, Johannes Tauler wrote these words of wisdom: “Many people would gladly be God's witnesses when everything goes according to their wishes. Once, however . . . they know the terrors and temptations of spiritual darkness . . . they turn back and are no witnesses at all. Oh, if only they could free themselves of this illusion, and learn to look for peace in tribulation.

“Only there is born lasting peace that will endure; if you look elsewhere, you will fail miserably. If we could break through and weather such storms, we would arrive at that peace which no one can take from us” (*For All the Saints*, Volume III, pp. 1086–1087).

Herbert W. Chilstrom, a former presiding bishop of the ELCA, also has experience as a parish pastor, college professor, and synod bishop. He has also written several books.

PRAYER CARDS

by Sheri Lee Sears

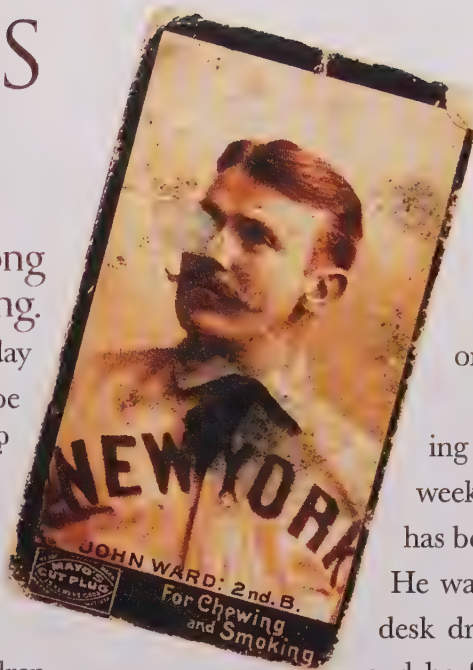
It's funny, in this life, how things long forgotten return to you as a blessing. Do you realize that the little things you do each day are how you are remembered, and that you can be changing someone's life with each tiny action? Most often, we never know how we influence another person's life. But in one case, I was fortunate to hear how the story came out.

Early in the 1980s, I was a Sunday school teacher for first-grade boys and girls. The children were curious about God, and as they learned to read, the stories we read together excited them. It was the perfect age to plant the seeds of love and care for all God's children. I believed that learning to pray for others was a valuable lesson, so one day I brought a stack of sports cards to class. Each child was invited to pick a card from the stack. When they had made their selections, we talked about concern for others—family, friends, and even strangers. Their assignment was to follow the career of their chosen sports figure and to include that person in their prayers. Occasionally I asked how it was going, but after a while the children usually responded with a shrug. Soon the idea was forgotten, and new lessons pushed the sports cards to the background.

The story would have ended there, but then last year I got a phone call. "Hi," a young man said, "This is Michael Hansen. Do you remember me?"

I racked my brain, but the name wasn't familiar. Feeling a bit sheepish I answered, "I'm sorry, Michael. How do I know you?"

He laughed and said, "You were my first-grade Sunday school teacher. Something just came up, and



I needed to tell you."

"Oh? Please go on," I said.

"I will be graduating from college next week, and my roommate has been helping me pack. He was going through my desk drawers this morning, and he found the basketball

card you gave me in Sunday school. Yes, I've kept it all these years, and I still remember how you told us that God wants us to think first about others. I still use it to remind me to pray for others, and I still pray for my basketball player. And I thank you for that precious gift."

By this time, the tears were running down my face. I was so moved to learn that something I had said to a young child was still important to him as an adult.

"There's more," he continued. "My roommate thinks I should sell the card to pay off my student loans. But I'll never give it up. The card I picked had my first name on it, and that's why I chose it. I could read Michael. The card that I've used all these years to remind me to pray is Michael Jordan's rookie card!"

And my tears turned to laughter. Will we ever know if Michael Jordan's great success was the result of prayer? To Michael Hansen, there's no doubt about it!

Sheri Lee Sears lives in Wisconsin and belongs to Hope Lutheran Church, Wautoma. She is the mother of four girls and grandmother of seven.



by Robert Elie

During the chaotic years of the 1960s, John Hines, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal church, reminded us that God created the world out of chaos and suggested that chaos is not always a bad thing and that God needs some chaos to create a new world. That infuriated some of the faithful who felt their values were being trampled, but encouraged others who felt that change on many fronts was long overdue. In retrospect, both were right.

as a

Creative
Opportunity

During the 1960s, the civil rights of all Americans were significantly enhanced, the plight of the poor and disenfranchised was acknowledged, the liberation of women gained momentum, and a disastrous war was resisted. At the same time, the loosening of sexual mores and new freedoms brought ruin to many families, Vietnam veterans were treated shamefully, and the drug culture devastated millions of young people.

Bishop Hines was right. God did create the world out of chaos, and God still does. But how much chaos can we stand? And when does it spawn destruction rather than creativity? By definition chaos is a state of confusion and disorder. It feels as though no one is in charge, the future is totally unpredictable, and what is familiar is nowhere to be found. Chaos leaves us feeling ungrounded, out of balance, threatened. Scary stuff for us mere human beings.

Another bishop during that same time used to say that, given the chaos of the time, he wasn't surprised at how many people were immobilized by it. What did surprise him was how many rose to the occasion and created new, life-giving movements and institutions.

What made the difference? Those who responded creatively were generally people of great faith who were able to focus on what they discerned to be movements of the Spirit. Paradoxically, they were people who were deeply rooted in old values yet simultaneously had the freedom to question nearly everything.

Over the past several years, the parish to which I belong has experienced conflict and not a little chaos. Clergy were dismissed, people behaved miserably, contentious "camps" developed, finances and organization went down the tubes. The safe, challenging, nurturing place we had known for 25 years was no longer any of those things. Interim clergy were hired, we began to examine our experience, the tension gradually eased, and the healing began. But we have not returned to normal. In our struggle to re-create ourselves, parish-

ioners with wonderful new ideas and energy began to surface. From their initiatives and with their leadership we have begun to redefine our parish's ministry and mission. We are putting the pieces together in a distinctly new mosaic. A new creation is emerging.

On Good Friday last spring, my wife and I visited Ground Zero, the site of the most devastating chaos this nation has experienced in years. There were hordes of people there, with police guiding them firmly but politely along the sidewalks. For nearly an hour we circled St. Paul's Church, which stands right next to the chasm that was once the World Trade Center, looking at thousands of signs, prayers, and pictures attached to the fence enclosing the historic church and cemetery. It was a collage of American love, generosity, and creativity.

The naïve poetry and paintings of schoolchildren were perhaps the most touching of all. In spite of the chaos and fear we were all feeling, the tragedy called forth creativity from the very center of these children. Perhaps even more amazing was what was going on inside St. Paul's. The parishioners had turned their building and its community into a full-time respite center for weary construction workers and police. Two teenagers stood at the gate patiently explaining to streams of visitors that this was the parish's ministry. And from a site just north of Ground Zero we could see a cross fashioned out of World Trade Center girders that marked the site of a Good Friday service for Christian workers. In the background hung a huge American flag.

What impressed us from our visit to New York was the resiliency of Americans in general and of New Yorkers in particular. St. Paul's Church is a small example of a much greater creativity that arose from the chaos of September 11 and its aftermath. Many communities launched courses on Islam and the Arab world, neighbors reached out to neighbors, Christians

sought to understand better their Muslim brothers and sisters. Our parochial view of the world was shattered, and we are, I hope, re-assembling one that is more inclusive and respectful of others.

But there is a darker side, too. Terrorism also narrowed the vision of some, spawning hatred and intolerance of those different from us. Several terrible incidents of raw bigotry were reported in the days and weeks following September 11. And in our fervor to quell the chaos, we run the risk of greater unrest. American world prestige and power can alienate other world citizens as easily as it can help to liberate them.

In the midst of chaos, how do we stay on the creative side and avoid the destructive possibilities in all of us? What can make the difference? Probably knowing the fragility and dark corners of ourselves as fully as we dare and nurturing ourselves with as many life-giving resources as we can find. Then we can at least lean toward the creative when chaos and fear strike.

My life, like everyone else's, periodically lapses into chaos—both little chaoses and big chaoses. It's the little ones that bother me the most. Recently, I left the nametag that gets me into the parking lot at work on my dresser at home. I also missed my morning ritual of prayer and meditation because I lounged in bed longer than usual. I started the day feeling uncentered. Then I forgot about a meeting I had scheduled for noon, and was unprepared for my presentation. So I performed instant homework in the 10 minutes it took me to walk to the meeting and offered humble apologies for what I couldn't produce.

I felt like I was playing catch-up all day. The papers littering my desk at the office were an invitation to disaster, and I knew I would not be able to go through them until the end of the week. My desk at home was not much better. When I finally headed home at the end of the day, I was anxious and disgruntled. I felt like chaos reigned on every front.

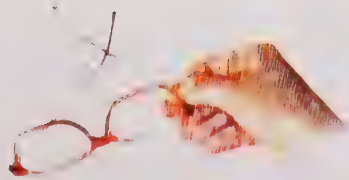
When I have a day like that, I have a benign but irrational desire to wash the kitchen floor, no matter what is going on in that room. I somehow imagine that if I can restore order in one corner of my life, no matter how irrelevant, I can rein in my anxiety and begin to tackle the more seriously disorderly parts. Not a bad strategy, but also a bit neurotic in an instructive sort of way.

When it comes to chaos, everyone has their limits, what we can and cannot tolerate before we try to remedy it—sometimes with dysfunctional, or worse, destructive behavior. When threatened, there is a natural tendency in all of us either to shut down and shut out, or to attack and destroy.

But the real remedy for chaos is to widen and deepen our center. The more peace we experience there, the more we can live creatively with the disorder that is most of life. That takes discipline. It takes silence and solitude to find our center, and it takes the resources of our faith to nurture the trust that God is present in the turmoil of our time.

Not surprisingly, it is in the apocalyptic material of the New Testament that the vision of a new creation is made most explicit. The book of Revelation was written at a time when Jerusalem had fallen and Christians were being put to death for refusing to worship the emperor. The writer reminded his readers that despite the chaos of their time, God reigned supreme. Revelation 21 contains the wonderful image of God dwelling among his people, wiping away tears from their eyes: "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' " It is nearly impossible at times to see the new world God is making, but this promise is at the heart of our faith. We are all invited to be a part of that new creation.

Robert Cotton Fite is director of the Pastoral Care Center at Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Ill.



READER CALL

What Faith Question Have You Had to Deal with after the Events of September 11, 2001?

Grief and Sadness Cushioned by Faith

September 11, 2001, caused me to have great fear and tremendous sadness. The ebbing grief over my father's death exactly three months earlier was intensified by these events.

My father died of cancer. For days, family members stood around the hospital bed in his living room praying for God to take him and end his suffering. I felt that those prayers were ignored. When Dad finally left us, his departure was far from peaceful.

Like the televised images of September 11, the images of the last days, hours, and final moments of my dad's life will never leave my mind. I have tried to find answers with more substance than, "We don't know why God works in these ways," or "God doesn't make bad things happen."

God is omnipotent, and we are taught to believe that we need only ask God and we shall receive. Since June 11, I have struggled to continue to believe that. I suspect that since September 11, thousands of others are struggling with that concept as well.

As time passes my faith struggles are diminishing somewhat. I still feel separated from God and terribly alone. I do believe that God, through Jesus, understands the depth of pain we humans feel. Therefore God understands why I feel such anguish now. I hope that my lifelong faith will sustain me

and bring me back around to a stronger faith and deeper understanding.

*Linda McDonald—Bismarck, North Dakota
Lord of Life Lutheran Church*

Out of Tragedy, Human Connection Strengthened

Like every other person who lived through those scary days, I experienced the grief hangover that seemed to hover over the nation like a dark cloud—a nationwide funk that affected everyone. I remember not wanting to indulge in my usual daydreams about jetting off to Europe or flying off to Africa for a holiday. I felt so robbed. I had many questions then. Why did this happen? Where was God? When will things return to normal?

About a year has passed, and normalcy as we knew it has not returned, though sometimes there are glimpses of it here and there. Lately we have had the luxury of not experiencing terrorism first-hand. But Palestinian and Israeli families have. Today my questions are about the lasting effect. Are the same issues that were brought to light soon after the attacks ignored now that time has passed?

The attack did bring us closer to being able to relate to war. For me, it made the human connection stronger and the far-off lands in the Middle East less remote.

Caroline Jenk—Venice, Florida

Transforming MUD

A Memorial for the Missing

During one of my sleepless nights after September 11, 2001, it occurred to me that I had to make 6,000 sculptures. I'd heard news reports that 6,000 people were missing and could not come up with any way of understanding how many people this was. I resolved that the next day I would begin making sculptures until I could visually comprehend how many 6,000 people were. And so I began a project whose scope and scale expanded even as the numbers of people reported missing, thankfully, dropped.

by Scott Sherk



I BEGAN BY COUNTING BRICKS IN THE FLOOR of the Baker Center for the Arts at Muhlenberg College, where I teach sculpture. I reasoned that I could identify 3,000 bricks and begin by placing two sculptures to a brick. I couldn't believe my first count; it seemed to cover an immense area. I re-counted twice.

It was still a very large area that I had identified, and I began to understand that this was something I would have to share.

A community project was born. By that evening, worktables, chairs, and hundreds of pounds of clay had been set up in the area and the first 50 sculptures had been made.

It didn't take much to get people involved. Students began work immediately. My colleagues in the art department began recruiting their classes to help. Word circulated around campus, and by week's end, the rhythm of an ongoing vigil was established. Students, faculty, staff, and members of the greater community took turns grabbing handfuls of clay, sitting

at a worktable, and fashioning a sculpture to be added to the growing collection of memorials for the missing. Students put up signs that read, "No talent required, just a sense of humanity." Artists and art students joined in, and so did people who had not touched wet clay since kindergarten. Members of the music department

began performing original and improvised music in the space as people made sculptures. The African Drum Ensemble began performing regularly as people worked. The dance classes choreographed dances to be performed around the memorial sculptures. People volunteered to read poetry and papers inspired by the events. I even performed a solo

bagpipe concert among the sculptures and sculptors.

A staggering observation emerged from all this: People were pouring their hearts and souls into this project. And a new slogan was coined for the project: "Thousands of people missing, all of them different—thousands of sculptures, all of them different."



People were pouring their hearts and souls into this project.



When I initially recruited people to come help make thousands of sculptures, I imagined participants contributing quick, rough sketches in clay. What emerged, however, was totally different. People would sit down with clay and find they were still working an hour later. One could see that people felt compelled to create something special in the concentration with which they worked and the forms that they made. Angels predominated, with turtles a close second. And then there were firemen and images of the towers. There were also people running, mothers

the mourner fills the void by fashioning a symbolic and magical presence.

By the last day of classes in the fall term, the project was finished. Hundreds of people had contributed, and we ended with 3,000 sculptures. Three thousand doesn't sound like a lot—but it is. Three thousand different things, made with care, love, and great sensitivity, are a great many things. Three thousand people (a more accurate figure of lives lost that day), each with their own cares, loves, and sensitivities, is still a number beyond comprehension.

We finished the project by opening pathways within the display area and letting people pass through so they could see each and every sculpture. There was music, and candles, and moments of silence; and then we removed the clay sculptures and recycled them.

"I still see it there—all the sculptures, even though it's been removed. It's permanently embedded in my



cradling babies, faces screaming, and figures standing alone. Some were crude, some were more refined, but all were deeply moving and sincerely made.

Where did all this come from?

It is easy to imagine the very first sculptures being created thousands of years ago by someone idly handling a malleable ball of mud. Perhaps those first sculptures, made in a cave around a fire, also emerged from an absence and emptiness. Maybe the first sculptures were also attempts to fill a recent void with something tangible. The hungry hunter fashions a clay deer; the lonely one fashions a mate;

mind," Jacqueline Gravina, an art major, said to me recently. The sadness of September 11 hasn't left, but we have tried to pay some tribute to those that have been lost, and in the process have been able to find within us a sense of community and shared humanity. The recycled clay will be used for years to come to teach undergraduates something about the magic of art and of themselves.

Scott Sherk is an artist and professor of art at Muhlenberg College. His most recent solo show was at the Kim Foster Gallery in New York City.



IDEANET

How Do You Reach Out to God's Children of All Ages?

Every fall since I have been a member of Christ the King, the women bake cookies to send off to our young people who are either in the military or at college.

Almost everything we pack into the box is edible, including the popcorn that cushions the baked goods. We also include a handwritten note from all the church ladies. Sometimes we receive notes back from the kids, thanking us for thinking of them, praying for them, and allowing them to share their faith foundation with others in their dorms.

I have always thought that this was a wonderful way to stay in touch with our young people and continue to care for them.

Joanne Wilhelm—Nashua, New Hampshire
Christ the King

We have many single seniors in our congregation. As Janet Nelson said of her church (*IdeaNet*, April 2002), many are widows. During the 1990s, one of our widows suggested that we band together and have an active group for single seniors. We have two small groups of eight to 10 people. We meet the third Wednesday of each month, in the morning. We discuss current events, play games, or bring pictures to share. We always close with the sharing of prayer requests and a devotional.

Although we do not have male members yet (I

think they are afraid of us), we think that if we get with it, we could grow large enough to become a national organization!

Jane Rosenburg—Tustin, California

Each Women of the ELCA member at our church was asked to bring a box of cake mix, frosting, small plates, napkins, a pack of birthday party invitations, and one birthday card. I supplied brown paper bags, stamping materials, hole puncher, and ribbon. We decorated each bag, filled it with party items, and tied it with a ribbon. We put 15 together and took them to the Salvation Army to be given to families for parties. Everyone was ready to do it again, so I think it will be an annual thing.

Margaret Dowd—Hartland, Minnesota
Central Freeborn Lutheran Church

The women's group at our congregation this past March had a mother-and-children day out with movies and then dinner together. It was a great experience for me, because I was able to enjoy an evening out with the women of my church, and also have my daughter in attendance as well. Thanks for allowing me to share!

Valerie R. Maggitt—Chicago, Illinois
United in Christ Lutheran Church



MOTHERING SEASONS

Through Our Children's Eyes

by Kirsi Stjerna

THAT WINTER, HE STARTED DRAWING PICTURES OF MOMMY WITH A SAD FACE. PICTURE AFTER PICTURE, THE BOY PROVIDED HIS MOTHER WITH AN IMAGINATIVE COMMENTARY ON THEIR FAMILY SITUATION. THE PICTURE OF "MOM AND DAD GETTING MARRIED"—with them dressed up fancy and surrounded by little pink drops falling from a dark cloud hanging over his mother's head—brought the tears his mother had tried to keep hidden from the children. The boy wanted to know why Mommy was crying.

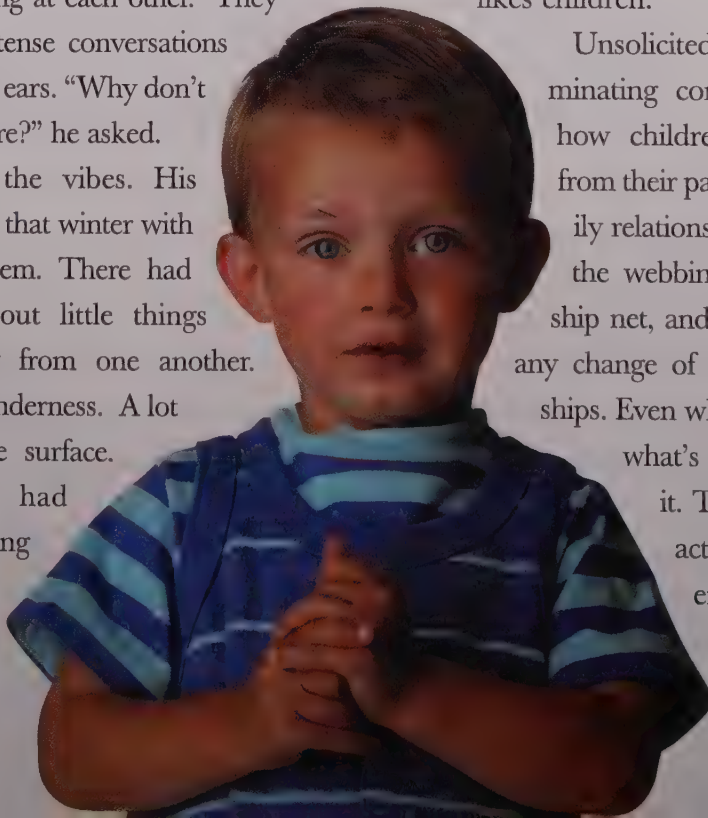
He had observed a lot, including the emotions his parents thought they had kept well hidden. "Mom and Dad, I don't like you yelling at each other." They hadn't realized that their tense conversations sounded like yelling to little ears. "Why don't you like each other anymore?" he asked.

He had picked up the vibes. His parents had reached a limit that winter with all that was bothering them. There had been more snapping about little things and emotional distancing from one another. Impatience had replaced tenderness. A lot was simmering below the surface. The child's antennae had registered those things long before the parents had the courage to start talking about them.

One day, out of the blue, the boy with big eyes and ears said to his mother, "You know, I think you and I should move to a little house, and Dad and my sister will move to another apartment." He had figured it all out.

He had figured out what divorce means: "That's when Mom and Dad don't like each other anymore and they move apart." He had been thinking about his parents divorcing before the word was even mentioned. With the same breath he asked, "What are step-parents?" He had already determined that a good step-parent is "somebody who likes children."

Unsolicited, heartbreaking, and illuminating conversations often reveal how children cannot be protected from their parents' pain regarding family relationships. Children are part of the webbing that makes a relationship net, and are therefore affected by any change of energy in these relationships. Even when they cannot articulate what's going on, children sense it. They react emotionally by acting out. If they are old enough to think more deeply, they may even blame themselves.



By nature, children see everything as revolving around them, including their parents' marital problems. It must be scary to witness the world around them drastically changing and realize that they have no control over it. Something that feels so catastrophic may make them momentarily doubt everything, including their parents' love for them. Children may find it difficult to separate their parents' feelings toward one another and their parents' feelings for and commitment to their children—at first, anyway.

The boy became very affectionate to his parents, not wanting to ever leave them alone, not even during sleeping hours. He clung to them because he loved them. And he kept drawing pictures with different scenarios. His behavior was a wake-up call for his parents to get to the bottom of their unhappiness. That meant late-night, after-bedtime conversations, which were the beginning of a happier future. The little boy, the little intuitor, had taken a lead in initiating a process for making the changes needed for everybody's happiness.

Children know, and they are deeply emotionally involved in the process of something as dramatic as divorce—potential or actual. This knowing needs to be respected. They need to be kept informed (as appropriate to their age) to soothe their fears, to give them hope, to make their eyes happy again.

I know of children, adults now, whose parents either divorced or were about to and failed to include their children in any real conversation. The scars have often been lasting, manifested in issues of self-esteem and trust. Then there are parents who have included their children too much, who have gotten them entangled on different sides, making

When divorce
is in the air,
it is easy to lose
sight of the little
people who are
hurting as well.
How chaotic
the home feels
depends on how
wisely the
parents can deal
with the situation.

them feel unfairly responsible and making them participate in messy situations.

When divorce is in the air, it is easy to lose sight of the little people who are hurting as well. How chaotic the home feels depends on how wisely the parents can deal with the situation. Children often receive much more emotional care in cases of death than in cases of separation. This is probably because when it is death that pulls parents apart, there's more pulling together by the survivors and less personal anger involved. People find

it harder to pull together when they are pulling themselves apart from one another. Who pulls things together for children when parents separate?

Parents have to manage to make sure their children feel safe and loved amidst it all. They must assure their children that they do not have to lose either parent, even if the parents find themselves happier living apart. If the parents are happier as a result, that happiness will affect the children positively, too.

It is up to parents to make their crisis a gateway to new ways of relating and loving, where a child doesn't have to lose one or both parents, where life continues toward the better. People with big hearts and great care for their children have been able to navigate ending their family life as it used to be and moving on so that children feel safe and are actually better equipped to face storms of their own. Chaos can lead to a greater joy, through many tears, through much forgiving, and through hopeful loving.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. She is a member of Christ Lutheran.

by Clare La Plante

Twenty years ago I was on a plane to London with my entire family.

An hour into the flight, after a heart-stopping altitude drop over the Atlantic, the pilot told us we had lost an engine. No big deal, he said. The plane had three good engines and could fly on one, if need be.

Several minutes later, the pilot came back on the intercom and told us we had lost another engine. A few minutes later, the same thing happened. It became a bizarre type of countdown, almost funny in a macabre sort of way—a sort of Addams Family vacation. We were instructed to get our seats into the upright position for safety, although landing safely on an ocean seemed an incongruous thought, at best. For the next hour, as we headed back to New York, I knew terror.

One of my sisters, sitting behind me, had her rosary beads in hand. Another, in front of me, listened to Frank Sinatra on her Walkman—“Fly Me to the Moon” instead of this reality. My father, two seats from me, kept muttering, like a bad mantra, “We’re going down.”

We didn’t. We landed and got off the plane safely. But from that moment on, I have been terrified to fly. I don’t really blame my fear of flying on that petrifying day in January, though. I think the fear was lurking there all along and just needed a nudge for me to realize that I had no control over that little cabin in the sky.

It’s kind of like life, if you think about it. We’re hurtling through space in a fragile little vehicle. We may run into nature’s vagaries or man’s inhumanity to man. We can only hope for a safe landing.

For now, at least, I’ve found some ways to get through flying when I have to. I take bits of sleeping pills, although frankly I’d rather be alert if I’m going to be swimming in the ocean between continents. Or I simply tell myself that, if I ask sweetly enough,



the pilot will pull over in Boise or Des Moines and let me out for a breath of air.

In real life, on the ground, I have other tricks that make me feel like I'm in control of this crazy life. I've charted my destiny: graduate at this age, marry at this one, live in this town, and travel to these countries—although I've gone way off course.

Or I'll map out my responses to a situation ahead of time. I try convincing others of the best way to respond to me (a charming habit I'm trying to quit). I don't leave much space for improvisation.

I appeal to the saints—invocations and supplications, promises and threats—but I'm realizing more and more that the responses I get are about as good as the prayers I use. And the most effective prayers leave a lot open to interpretation.

In a pinch, I hold my breath—not consciously, though. It's a habit. On some deep level I must think that standing still and not moving can stop the world from moving without me. And so I try, over and over again, in my puny little ways, to control the world to make it conform to my ideas.

Hey, I'm not the only one. Remember control-top panty hose? Those horrible gut-wrenching articles of clothing that should only be used as head coverings in robberies? Or car alarms, house alarms, personal alarms—we're the most protected people on earth, and the beepiest. We're also the most insured people. We live in bigger and bigger fortresses. We're driving bigger and bigger cars. I'm expecting to see people driving their houses to the mall next.

Control is an illusion. Life is filled with disappointments, detours, and tragedies. They range from the mundane—the weather that changes the picnic to an indoor party—to the profound—think of the people who were working in the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, or the Afghans who were in their villages when they were bombed.

I haven't yet figured out how to let go of this illusion of control. I know one thing: I don't recall with any fondness the times I stayed home because I thought it was too scary to venture out. However, I do remember an unexpected boat ride that took me into the wild waters of the South, a dance at a wedding that led to love, and any of my various white-knuckle flights—even the one that went bump in the night. It's like diving off the high dive. You have a lifeguard, you know how to swim. You just have to take that leap of faith.

Not the most practical tool, it would seem, this faith. Merriam-Webster's says faith is "A firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust." That's not how we're usually told to prepare for a journey. Look at the definition in Merriam-Webster of control: "To reduce the incidence or severity of—especially to innocuous levels."

Add the word "life" to either of these definitions—"A firm belief in life, for which there is no proof." "To reduce the incidence or severity of life to innocuous levels." I rest my case.

So try having a firm belief in something for which there is no proof. Speak up at the meeting. Voice your opinion. Tell your child, or your boss, that you don't know the answer. In your next prayer, admit your fears, anger, and doubts. Go into the town square, tear off your clothes, renounce your worldly goods, and follow your own path, as St. Francis did—metaphorically, please. Do the dance you'd like to do. Or, to paraphrase Eleanor Roosevelt, do that which is hardest to do.

The next time I fly—and that's going to be the long trek to Seattle for my best friend's wedding—I'm going to tell myself that no, it's not possible for me to get off in Boise, no matter how nicely I ask. I also try to remember that Boise can't offer me any more security than an uncharted trip through the skies.

Clare La Plante is a writer and reporter in the Chicago area.



GOD'S DISASTER RESPONSE

by Linda Daniels-Block

I look out at the mountains, and they are hazy with smoke. The fires are burning hillsides parched by the long drought. The air is heavy, and breathing in doesn't invigorate with crisp air and new life; instead, it gives me an aching head. I am beginning to realize that the months of drought ahead could be filled with smoky, headachy days, and I wonder what the future might be like. Where is the fresh mountain air we were accustomed to?

The climate of relative security we have enjoyed for so many years in the United States has dried up. We have entered into a different kind of drought, a drought of safety. Sparks of fear ignite at airports, at public celebrations, even in the letters in our mailboxes. Security used to be the vocation of night guards, locks, and alarm systems. Now, security is something we have lost and may never recover again. Everywhere, we mourn its loss—in our schools, in our Fourth of July celebrations, even in our churches. We are living in smoke-filled air, changing the way we used to breathe. Normal breathing doesn't feel so normal now, and we are parched from the effort of trying to make daily life make sense again.

In chat rooms on the Internet and in conversations at social gatherings, people are trying to figure it out, to bring some order to this chaos with statements like “God is in control,” or “It's the end of time,” or “Everything happens for a reason—God has everything mapped out.”

What is our answer to this armchair theology? What is God's will in this terrible chaos? And do we dare ask the fear factor question: Was last September 11 God's will?

In a time like this, when the going is really tough and faith can be shaken, I must confess that I love being Lutheran. Thanks be to God, Lutheranism was born in a time like this! Martin Luther had no time for silly theoretical questions; his objections to destructive religious practices soon had him fleeing for his life. The great gift of Luther's struggles and his troubled time is that he begins with the evil, violence, hunger for power, human suffering, and sin of the world, and knows with all his heart that Jesus is God's astounding response. What God wills, what God has planned for this world, is revealed in the story of Jesus.

As Lutherans, we want to deal with God's revelation, the Bible, as a whole, not snipping out little

pieces to quote to people in order to answer little problems. We want to hear Jesus' words in the context in which he said them, and remember them in the meaning of his whole life, death, and resurrection. Then we want to reflect on his words while remembering God's promises from the beginning in the garden.

There is a wonderful Greek word that means this kind of remembering—*anamnesis* (This do in remembrance). We store Jesus' words in our memory with his life, his other teachings, God's promises, and all the rest. He even says if we want to understand, then do this—break my bread, drink my cup—to remember.

As we do this kind of remembering, God's will for us and our world starts to become very clear, even in the middle of chaotic times. God's desire was to keep us close, as we see in the Garden. God's will worked through the prophets to bring us back when we wandered. God promised and then blessed us with a Savior who would take this terrible pain and chaos and their consequences and die for us. Then God created new life and new pathways home in the resurrection. And this, we are promised, is just the beginning of the new future God has planned, where all the evil, death, and destruction will be finally conquered and everything will be new—a new heaven and a new earth, all, everyone, rejoicing in God's presence.

There is another handy little theological word to help us grasp this miracle-in-the-making. The word *prolepsis* describes how God's future is actually coming backward into our present time, taking our hands and pulling us forward and giving us enticing glimpses into what we will be when God's will is finally satisfied. This collective memory we hold together of God's salvation at work is all hope and promise, pulling and pushing toward God's light and putting the darkness in its place.

But the biblical witness also reveals to us that we still live in the midst of a battle zone. The power of the living God is at war with all the forces of evil. Our daily lives are the battleground. The war to conquer “sin, death, and the power of the devil” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, Meaning of Second Article) has been won, but battles still go on. God’s reign is already here, but it is still coming in its fullness. We have the weapons and power of God’s Spirit as we enter with God into battle against the darkness, and many times each day, we decide if we will work for the continuing unfolding of God’s reign of light, the Kingdom of God, or if we will assist the darkness by decision, complacency, or even denial.

Discerning what is God’s will or God’s guiding in the nuances of daily life will never be easy. Figuring out what is the best action in a broken world and letting God’s grace abound is a Lutheran response. “Try not to make things worse,” was the advice given to me as a new pastor by my bishop,

and punishes the unjust. But the more we think about it, that kind of God is frightening, because if this is the way God thinks and acts—slamming down judgment on frail, failing sinners—then where does that leave us? I write this as a sinner, one who often fails to do God’s gracious will, and you read this as a sinner. If God’s perfect will must be fulfilled, or we will be destroyed by judgment, then I am lost. My experience tells me that you are, too.

I get nervous around judgmental people. They seem to be saying, you make me uncomfortable because you are different from me, have ideas unfamiliar to me, are saying or doing things I don’t like, that are foreign to me, are too liberal or conservative, are too strong or weak or outspoken or quiet, and (here’s where I start watching my back) therefore you are bad and must be stopped or punished or changed or even killed.

When someone carries out this belief in the

These broken, hurtful things will pass away and

Wayne Weissenbuehler, many years ago. That particular piece of mentoring has held up well.

How sad that for many people, God’s will seems frightening. For them, God expects excellence in all actions and decisions, and if they fail, look out, because they will receive judgment for their mistakes. We’ve heard it before. Years ago, cancer was thought to be judgment for something. Today, HIV/AIDS is pronounced as judgment on homosexual acts or on Africa in general. There is a determinism in this way of thinking that may initially be comforting to some—God is in control

name of religion, what do we get? September 11? The Holocaust? Genocide? At the very least, people are hurt, religion becomes intolerant, people who are different are attacked emotionally, even physically. Now I could be wrong, but under this kind of thinking, this kind of religious system, I am doomed. Doggone it, no matter how hard I try, I make mistakes. I fail. What I intend is not what I always do, and vice versa. Despite my best efforts, here I am, a broken human being. I have heard this kind of religious thinking from others on occasion, and have the gray hairs to prove it. And it didn’t feel

like God I was hearing. Those judgments felt like more human brokenness.

I love being Lutheran. When I look inside myself during my prayers at night and when I think about September 11, I am profoundly thankful that I was raised in a faith that knows we all need forgiveness. I grew up hearing my mother pray, “Sweet Jesus,” as she knelt and prayed with someone in suffering and even in death. I am thankful that I have always known I am a sinner before God. I have always understood that I am saved by God’s act of amazing grace in giving the world this sweet Jesus so that sins are forgiven.

Like the Wheat Bowl of Montana with its drought, our whole world has been declared a disaster area in need of help and saving.

The disasters of the world—the violence, stinginess, and lack of caring—are the result of our sin. Let’s not blame them on God or even ask God to justify humanity’s self-willed behavior. Why do we sin,

God is not about enjoying punishment—thanks be to God! God’s will is to save all of God’s beloved creation, like a mother who rejoices when her children are back in their family’s loving embrace, safe and sound, home again.

The New Testament witness is not of a God whose will is unpredictable and capricious. God does not leave us second-guessing, creating chaos in our life. If we are saying to God, “I really want this to happen so I pray that you’ll make sure it does,” then God might seem unpredictable. After all, we are asking God to fit into our hopes, and when God does not comply, we might feel puzzled or even let down. Why doesn’t God answer in the way we imagined? But this is not the way God works. We belong to God, not the other way around.

Remember what Jesus said when his disciples wanted to know what to pray for: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven. . . . Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin

All things will be made new. This is God’s will.

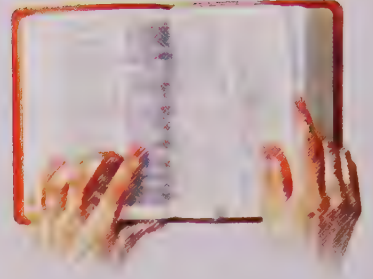
and then ask God to explain why the consequences are so hurtful? All this brokenness, this world of hurt, are not God’s will or God’s doing. God’s will is the disaster response: that all people and all things will be reconciled to God our Creator and that someday God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new’ ” (Revelation 21:4–5). These broken, hurtful things will pass away and all things will be made new. This is God’s will.

against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever” (The Lord’s Prayer, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 71). It’s all there—the hope, the future, the promise, the battle. This is where our life is. These are the living waters that can quench our deep thirst. Rejoice and remember.

Rev. Linda Daniels-Block and her husband are pastors of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Boulder, Colo. She is involved in community work, gardening, and creating abstract sculptures.

Session 1

All Who Are Thirsty, Come!



by Mary Hinkle

Study Texts

John 2:1–12; 19:25b–37

Theme Verse

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” (John 2:11)

Overview

This session’s title comes from Jesus’ invitation, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink” (John 7:37–38). In the Gospel of John, the first act of Jesus’ public ministry, at a wedding feast in the Galilean town of Cana, is to change a great quantity of water into wine that is judged “the best” (John 2:10 NIV). The last act of Jesus’ public ministry is to lay down his life, an even more extravagant sign that reveals the love of Jesus and the glory of God.

We will look at these two signs and reflect on how both demonstrate how extravagant Jesus is in his provision for others and how unrestrained he is in his demonstration of God’s glory. In different ways, both stories illustrate how Jesus, in his own life, acts out the truth of his words, “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10 NIV).

Opening

Jesus, come! For we invite you, guest and master, friend and Lord;
Now as once at Cana’s wedding, speak and let us hear your word:
Lead us through our need or doubting, hope be born and joy restored.

Jesus, come! Transform our pleasures, guide us into paths unknown;
Bring your gifts, command your servant, let us trust in you alone:
Though your hand may work in secret, all shall see what you have done.
(“Jesus come! For we invite you,” verses 1 & 2, *With One Voice*, 648)

1. What is the most festive occasion you have participated in during the last year? What made it so much fun?

A Wedding Feast

In Israel's scriptures, the wedding feast and the joy surrounding a marriage was a metaphor that described both the joy of everyday life and the delight that God and God's people were meant to find together. When God is angry at Israel's unfaithfulness, God pronounces judgment with the words, "I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your

eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride" (Jeremiah 16:9). Later, the prophets use the same image to speak God's promises of future restoration: "There shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord: 'Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!'" (Jeremiah 33:10b-11). Isaiah, too, speaks about the return of Israel from exile, saying, "as

THE THIRD DAY

When John begins the story of Jesus changing water into wine, he says that it happened "on the third day." It is not clear what John had in mind by describing the day this way. Here are some ideas.

Some readers of the Gospel think the phrase is meant only to divide John 2:1-12 from the story that has gone before it. In this way of thinking, "on the third day" functions very much like references to "the next day" in John 1:29, 35, and 43. It begins a new vignette in the life of Jesus.

Some readers hear an allusion to the book of Genesis in the words "on the third day." Just as John's Gospel had begun with an allusion to the creation story—both Genesis and John begin with the words, "In the beginning . . ."—so here in chapter 2 the author may be hearkening back to the first book of the Bible. On the third day of creation, God separated the waters from the dry land and commanded the earth to produce vegetation. Likewise, on a different "third day," the Son of God created wine, the fruit of the vine, where there had been only water before.

Some readers see "on the third day" as a pointer not so much backward to creation as forward to the resurrection. In John, the next sign Jesus performs is the cleansing of the temple. There he says, "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Although the people Jesus is speaking to are confused by this comment, the narrator of the Gospel tells us, "He was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this . . ." (John 2:21-22). Often in the

other Gospels, too, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, saying that "after three days" or "on the third day" he will be raised (see, for example, Mark 9:31; Matthew 20:19; Luke 24:7).

Finally, Paul testifies that Christ was raised "on the third day, according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). For those familiar with Christian witness to the resurrection, the simple phrase at the beginning of the water-to-wine miracle calls to mind another miracle of joy, abundance, and new life—that is, the resurrection.

the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5b). The joy of bride and bridegroom is symbolic of how it will be with Israel when God restores their fortunes and leads them home.

The Wine Runs Out

Read John 2:1–4. In the first century, the party surrounding a wedding could last as long as a week. At some point during the wedding feast in Cana, the hosts run out of wine. John does not tell us how Jesus' mother finds out or

why she mentions it to Jesus. Is she responsible in some way for co-hosting the party? Is she simply commenting on the circumstances? Or is she asking Jesus to do something to help? And if she wants him to help, what exactly does she have in mind? We do not know. There are gaps in the story as John tells it, details that are missing.

For his part, Jesus seems at first unconvinced that the lack of wine should matter to him and his mother. "What concern is that to you and to me?" he asks her. Jesus also appears

JESUS' ITINERARY IN JOHN

Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a number of features in common with each other that John does not share.

Because of their similarities to each other, the first three Gospels are sometimes called the "synoptic Gospels." They see things from a similar point of view. John, however, tells the story of Jesus differently.

For instance, instead of including many small stories and short sayings of Jesus, John tells fewer stories, and he connects those stories to lengthy

speeches from Jesus.

John also places many more scenes from Jesus' ministry in and around Jerusalem. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus is baptized in the Judean wilderness, near Jerusalem, and then carries out much of his ministry in Galilee, far north of the religious and political center of Jerusalem and the temple. Most of the healings, miracles, parables, and other scenes we remember from the first three Gospels also take place in Galilee. After the start of his ministry in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus travels to Jerusalem only once. He

goes to the holy city for a Passover celebration, where he is arrested, tried, killed, and raised from the dead.

By contrast, in the Gospel of John, almost all of Jesus' ministry takes place in and around Jerusalem. Jesus goes to Jerusalem for Passover celebrations both at the beginning and the end of his ministry (John 2:13; 12:12). In addition, he is in Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals of Sukkoth (John 7:14) and Hanukkah (John 10:22), as well as one other unnamed festival (John 5:1). In between these

festivals, Jesus is either back in Galilee, or he is hiding in the Judean wilderness from people who want to arrest or kill him (see John 11:54).

In all the Gospels, Jerusalem is a place of danger for Jesus, while the cities of Galilee are usually places where crowds of people welcome his ministry, even if they do not always understand his message. In your study of John, notice how references to geography and danger go together. When and where does Jesus hide? Where do attempts to arrest him take place?

reluctant to do anything about it. “My hour has not yet come,” he tells his mother.

2. **To what is Jesus referring when he says that his hour (or “time” in some translations) has not yet come? Look at the following passages in the Gospel to help answer the question.**

John 7:30 and John 8:20—What does not happen to Jesus because “his hour has not yet come?”

John 12:23–24 and John 17:1—When Jesus speaks these words, he is in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. What is about to happen to him there?

3. **Why do you think Jesus spoke of his hour in the context of the wedding at Cana?**

Go Deeper

Discuss in more depth the interaction between Jesus and his mother. What other biblical references can you find that might add perspective on their relationship?

Jesus’ Extravagant Sign: Much Good Wine

Read John 2:5–12. Regardless of whether Jesus thinks the timing is right to begin to reveal his glory, Mary directs the servants to “do whatever he tells you,” and Jesus directs them to fill the jars with water, draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast. The servants do what they are told. They fill the jars to the brim, draw some out, and take the water-turned-wine to the chief steward for him to taste. The steward does not know

where the wine has come from, but he knows upon tasting it that it is very good. Assuming that the bridegroom is responsible for the wine, he commends him: “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10).

4. **What do you think of Jesus making all that wine? Some people compare this miracle to the way Jesus feeds 5,000 in the wilderness (John 6:1–14). What similarities and differences do you see between providing bread for people and providing wine for them?**
5. **With whom do you most closely identify in this story, and why?**
 - The mother of Jesus: I trust that Jesus can do something good in a bad situation, even if I’m not sure exactly *what* he will do.

A THREE-YEAR MINISTRY

You may be familiar with the tradition that **Jesus’ ministry lasted about three years.**

We get this idea from John’s Gospel. John mentions three Passover celebrations during Jesus’ ministry, in chapters 2, 6, and 12. Jesus stays in Galilee for the

Passover mentioned in chapter 6, but is in Jerusalem for the other two. From Luke, we learn that Jesus was “about thirty years old when he began his work” (Luke 3:23). Putting together these two bits of information, we conclude that Jesus had a three-year ministry and was about 33 when he was killed.

- Jesus: Frankly, I would rather “blend” right now, but I will offer help when it is needed.
- The servants: I know what Jesus has done to make this party a success, but I’m not the type to say much about it.
- The chief steward: Wow! I know good wine when I taste it, but I would not expect that Jesus was responsible for it.
- The bridegroom: My theory is smile and nod, even if you have no idea what anyone is talking about.
- The disciples: I might not understand everything about what happened here, but I trust Jesus, and I’m going to keep on following him.

Jesus’ Extravagant Sign: Laying Down His Life

When Jesus changes water into wine, he reveals his glory and his disciples believe in him. John calls this miracle the first of Jesus’ signs. Other signs follow throughout the Gospel, until finally, as a last sign pointing to the glory of God, Jesus lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13). The first and last signs in the Gospel have many things in common with each other.

6. Read John 19:25–37. What points of contact do you see between the two stories? The table that follows directs you to some comparisons between the two signs. You may find other similarities between the two texts that are not listed here.

Who are the characters common to both scenes?	John 2:3–4	John 19:26
Note common need expressed.	2:3	19:28
Both stories feature wine, but one type is different from the other.	2:10	19:29
Water appears in both stories. What is it paired with in each?	2:7	19:34
How do the disciples respond? How does the narrator hope readers will respond?	2:11	19:35

Go Deeper

Both these signs of Jesus—his turning water to wine and his laying down his life—demonstrate things about the character of God and the shape of God’s glory. In the one case, God’s glory is shown through an extravagant party gesture. In the second case, God’s glory is shown in the horrible, violent, and excruciatingly painful death of Jesus by crucifixion. Reflect together on how strange it is to think of either of these activities as reflective of God’s glory.

Our Extravagant Hope

There is something abundantly and excessively unrestrained about providing 150 gallons of wine to a party where the guests have already had a lot to drink. The same excessive provision is evident when Jesus feeds 5,000 people starting with nothing but a little boy’s lunch (John 6:1–14). The people eat their fill, and the disciples gather twelve baskets full of leftovers.

How much more is Jesus’ acceptance of the cross an extravagant, excessive, costly demon-

stration of love and the glory of God! In Cana, at the start of Jesus' ministry, he shows that he will not be stingy in his display of God's glory. The miracle is almost unimaginable. *How* could such a thing come about? And *why* would Jesus do it? Yet he does do it. He turns all that water into wine, and in so doing, he gives a sign that points to the glory of God—glory which is itself unimaginable, except that it has been revealed by Jesus.

In the first chapter of John, we read, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18). That is what Jesus is doing when he turns water into wine at Cana: He is making God known. That is what Jesus is doing as well when he gives his life for the world: He is

making God known. For different reasons, these revelations of God may seem odd to us: Would God ever be such a party animal as to make all that wine? Would God ever be so vulnerable as to die like a common criminal at the hands of the state? Yet the testimony of John's Gospel is that throughout his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus is one with the Father and acting in order to show us our clearest picture of God.

As Christians, we believe that the God whom Jesus reveals to us is still acting in the world today and doing so in ways that are in character with what we know of God from the Bible. Thus the stories of the Bible are not just stories about the past. They also tell us about what we may expect of God in the present and the future. They speak our hope as much as our history.

SIGNS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The narrator tells us that Jesus' miracle in Cana was "the first of his signs" (John 2:11). This Gospel writer uses the word "sign" (in Greek, *sēmeion*) to describe several activities of Jesus that point beyond himself to God and God's glory. Scholars generally agree that the Gospel includes seven signs, a number that signals completeness in antiquity. However, different readers

of the Gospel disagree slightly on which activities of Jesus are numbered among the seven. For instance, some say that the miracle of Jesus' walking on water should count as a sign, while others include it as part of Jesus' feeding sign in chapter 6 and go on to count Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection as the seventh sign revealing God's glory.

Here is one example of a selection of seven signs that makes it possible to see the signs as

structured in a way that draws attention to the relationship between the first and last signs, the second and fourth, and the third and fifth.¹

1. Wedding feast with water turned into wine (2:1–12)
2. The restoration of the royal official's dying son (4:46–54)
3. The Sabbath healing at Bethzatha (5:1–16)
4. The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–71)
5. The Sabbath healing of

- the blind man (9:1–41)
6. The restoration of Lazarus to life (11:1–44)
7. The great hour of Jesus: the crucifixion, bitter wine, and the flow of water and blood from Jesus' side (19:17–37)

NOTE

1. This list is adapted from Marc Girard, "La composition structurelle des signes dans le quatrième évangile," *Studies in Religion* 9 (1980): 315–24. See also Joseph A. Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel: A Reappraisal," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 67–80.

7. Where in your own life or in the life of your congregation are you witnessing Jesus' extravagant love? Where does it look like the wine is running out (that is, where do you need help imagining a miracle like the one at Cana)? What might Jesus do about it?

Closing

Jesus come! in new creation, heav'n brought
near in pow'r divine;
Give your unexpected glory, changing water
into wine;
Rouse the faith of your disciples—come, our
first and greatest Sign!
Jesus come! surprise our dullness, make us
willing to receive
More than we can yet imagine, all the best you
have to give:
Let us find your hidden riches, taste your love,
believe, and live!
("Jesus come! For we invite you," verses 3 & 4,
With One Voice, 648)

Looking Ahead

Next month, we will focus on a teacher of the law, Nicodemus, and his relationship with Jesus. Nicodemus appears three times in the Gospel of John. Study texts are John 3:1–21; 7:45–52, and 19:38–42.

For further reading during the course of this study, leaders and participants may wish to pursue the following publications.

COMMENTARIES ON JOHN

Kysar, Robert

John

*Augsburg Commentary on
the New Testament*
Minneapolis: Augsburg
Publishing House, 1986.

O'Day, Gail R.

"The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9
Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

(This multi-volume Bible commentary is a great choice for a church library.)

BOOKS ON THE LITERARY FEATURES OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

Koester, Craig

*Symbolism in the Fourth
Gospel: Meaning, Mystery,*

Community

Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 1995.

Stibbe, Mark W. G.

John's Gospel
London: Routledge, 1994.

INTRODUCTORY TEXTBOOKS ON JOHN.

Culpepper, R. Alan

*The Gospel and Letters of
John. Interpreting Biblical
Texts series*
Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Köstenberger, Andreas

*Encountering John:
The Gospel in Historical,
Literary, and Theological
Perspective*
Grand Rapids, Michigan:
Baker Books, 1999.

this month's QUESTION

Go to www.elca.org/wo/lwt to enter your response. (Results will appear in January/February 2003 issue)

In which area are you most likely to make a faith resolution for 2003?

- A. Prayer life
- B. Volunteer efforts
- C. Financial support of your congregation or ELCA ministries
- D. Reading of scripture

PROJECT HOPE

by Danielle Welliever

We are all connected, not just one to another in the body of Christ, but to all of God's creation in all its various forms. (see Colossians 1:15-2)

Pollution, loss of habitat, warming temperatures, and a host of other environmental problems have upset the ecological balance of Pacific Northwest waters, changing Irene Martin's once thriving salmon-fishing and agricultural community into a community struggling for basic survival.

Unfortunately, the challenges facing Martin's community are not unique. While we are beginning to understand that the health of the natural world and our own well-being are integrally connected, we are often unsure about how to move forward in any practical way. Making appropriate choices about how to live will require God's leading. How might we begin the process of discernment?

Listen to the Whole

Our interdependency demands that we listen to voices that are not our own: voices from the margins of society, voices from the fish of the sea, and voices we must imagine from our grandchildren's children. When we do not include all the voices in our discernment process, we are not able to judge the effects our day-to-day choices may have on others.

Be Mindful of the Choices

Before entering the Promised Land, Moses reminded the people that blessings and curses had been set

before them. They were commanded to choose life so that they and their descendents might live long in the land that God had promised (see Deuteronomy 30:15-19). They had been commanded to be mindful and active participants in their daily choices. That same command stands before us today.

From the first cup of coffee in the morning to turning off the lights before bed, each of our daily activities represents a choice, a potential for blessing or curse. Choosing appropriately takes some education.

"How shall we live so that salmon, trees, and plants can live and support communities again?"

Irene Martin, *Lutheran Woman Today*, July/August 2002

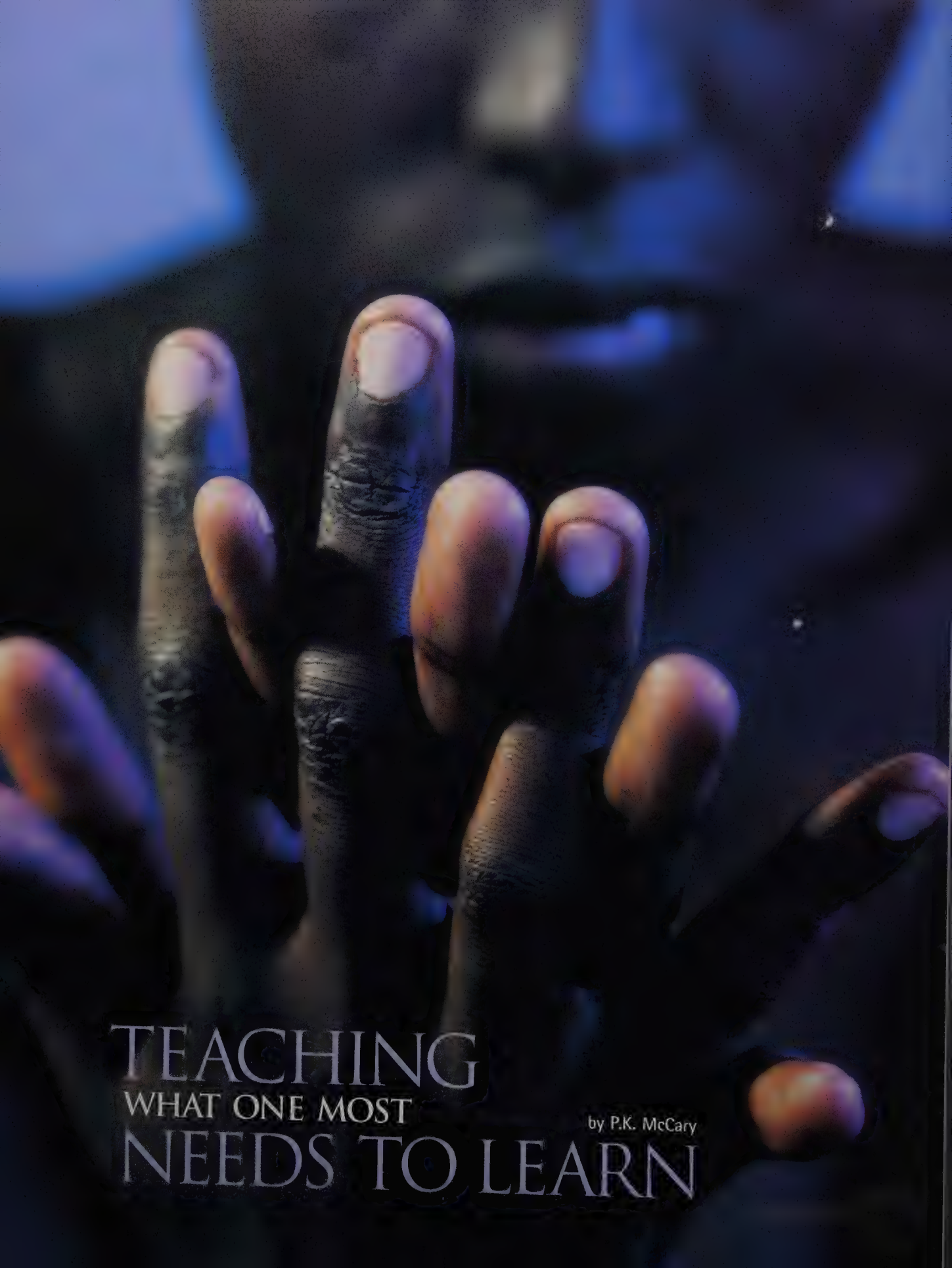
For instance, do we know what is involved in coffee production? Who receives the blessings? Who gets the curses? What about our energy choices? Water use? These daily activities

all are choices that we make, mindfully or not, and have blessings and curses attached. We must learn to choose carefully.

Choose Life!

The process of discernment requires patience and practice in allowing the Spirit to help us sort out competing claims in our complex world and help us make choices that are for the good of all. Following Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor, with particular care and attention to voices from the margins and voices that are not like our own, we can begin to make choices that reflect our true nature as members of Christ's kingdom.

Danielle Welliever is director of environmental education and advocacy for the ELCA.



TEACHING WHAT ONE MOST NEEDS TO LEARN

by P.K. McCary

I RECENTLY CONTRIBUTED TO A DAILY DEVOTIONAL, *What Can Happen When We Pray*. It became evident to me during the process that my experience as a writer has taught me this: What I share with others is often what I struggle with most. As I struggled to take a text and form a prayer to champion the lesson of the scripture, I came face to face with the one person I often try to avoid: Myself.

There are many facets to who I am. I am a mother, sister, daughter, and friend. I am a woman, a writer, and an African American. These facets of my life, along with the experiences gleaned through them, enable me to put pen to paper when writing to encourage others in their prayer life.

This particular writing experience helped me acknowledge my struggles as both a Christian and a woman. While coming face to face with my own personal struggles, it became important that I also bring the feminine voice to the words I write. It was important because there have been times as a woman that I've had to uncover layers of patriarchal synonyms and adjust my thinking to find the words that spoke to the heart of me, a woman.

What Can Happen When We Pray, published by Augsburg Fortress, is a compilation of writings from lay and clergy, women and men. It is written by African American writers, but it is not just an African American devotional. While it draws from the experiences of African Americans, it also speaks to the heart of every Christian who has ever been challenged at one time or another in their daily prayer life.

The truth is, prayer works. The truth also is that sometimes we forget that. Rev. Wyvetta Bullock recently shared these thoughts with me: "I constantly have to remind myself that faith is not a feeling but is based on God's promise. When we pray, we return God's word to God. God is faithful, and so encouraging others meant encouraging them to return to God's promise. That's where the hope is." But the

truth for Rev. Bullock also included the fact that "sometimes I don't feel like praying. Sometimes I doubt the power of prayer."

Rev. Angela Shannon is a trusted friend, but she was also my pastor. As we shared our writings before turning them in for publication, I was struck with the reality that writing for others is tantamount to feeling naked in front of an audience of people. You may well be fully clothed, but the doubts, reservations, struggles, and concerns sit right next to you as tap on the keyboard. Rev. Shannon acknowledged that the struggles of ministry loomed large for her.

The devotional was criticized for not making clear exactly who wrote what. But that's not what this devotion was about. If we flash back to last September 11, we discover that the scripture for that day was from Joshua 2:12b. "Give me a sign of good faith," begs Joshua. On that September day, many individuals begged for the same sign. In the midst of that tragedy, we stood as Joshua stood, facing unknown enemies and uncertainty. That's why the first line of the devotional prayer was so poignant. "Ever-guiding Creator, it seems as though you ask us to do the impossible." What was more impossible than that day? Does it matter if we know who the writer was, or does it matter that on this day the Comforter came through those words? We didn't know what the day would bring, but God did. As Rev. Bullock points out, the promise of God comes shining through.

"Prayer is the personal and corporate instrument of all that we believe," says Bishop Leotyne Kelly. "We

were created for connection with God and with others, not for isolation." Because of that, *What Can Happen When We Pray* speaks to the heart of an interaction that goes beyond our names and circumstances.

Several years ago, I was asked how I could be a Christian, especially post-slavery. It was a startling question, unexpected, and striking at something I had hidden in the back of my heart. I was momentarily speechless. I thought about it before I answered, and then I remembered something my grandmother used to say when I faced a trial: "God got us through slavery. You'll get through this just fine."

Bishop Kelly adds, "The miracle of Black people accepting the message of God's love through Jesus Christ enabled them to love one another and even those who enslaved them." For anyone who doesn't understand the strength of the Christian walk of an African American, it's simple. It simply goes to the heart of God's promise, a promise that includes us after years of being enslaved, after freedom and during everyday life.

God speaks to all of us and all that we are. And because of this, there are those of us who are commissioned to work throughout struggles, incon-

sistencies, and frustrations to encourage others to do the same. As I've been told over and over again, the power of prayer, why we pray, what our prayer is grounded in and focused on, is the challenge of every Christ-centered individual. Our challenge is to lend a hand, knowing that we're holding onto each other in this journey of faith.

So, that's the simple part. As we seek direction for our lives, we gain strength to be contributors because what we learn daily, we must share with others. Teaching others to pray, interpreting God's word through the Scriptures, makes sense to a faithful believer of God's word. We are challenged daily to overcome our imperfection, telling the story of perfection through Christ Jesus. Staying faithful to the course is definitely worth the journey.

To order *What Can Happen When We Pray*, contact Augsburg Fortress, Publishers at 800-328-4648.

P.K. McCary is an author, peace activist, and storyteller living in Houston, Texas. She attends Lamb of God Lutheran Church. She is also the mother of three wonderful children and one precious daughter-in-law.



WOMEN INVESTING IN MISSION

Lutheran women - and the congregational and synodical organizations they have founded - are helping to build the church by investing in the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA. To learn how you and your women's organization can participate or to obtain current interest rates, call the Fund today at (800) 638-3522, ext. 2943.



MISSION INVESTMENT FUND OF THE ELCA

8765 W. HIGGINS ROAD ♦ CHICAGO, IL 60631

E-MAIL: MIF@ELCA.ORG ♦ WEB: WWW.ELCA.ORG/OT/MIF

Mission Investments are subject to certain risks. See "Risk Factors" following the introduction in the Offering Circular. As securities issued by a non-profit religious institution, the investments are not insured by FDIC, SIPC or any federal or state regulatory agency. The securities are sold only by means of the Offering Circular, which can be obtained from the Mission Investment Fund.

ARGENTINIAN CHRISTIANS SHARE TRUE RICHES

by Mercedes García Bachmann

Where is God when all things are in chaos?

As you may know, these are difficult times for my country, Argentina. The Argentine economy and political system broke down in December 2001 due to years of corrupt, incompetent governments and irresponsible lending by foreign institutions.

Between December 20 and January 2, my country had five presidents. Not one was equipped to solve the problems that seemed insurmountable: rising taxes, prices, and unemployment; cutbacks in public health, education, and other services; reductions in wages for public employees and pensions for the retired; and an enormous devaluation in our currency. When the government froze private bank accounts just before Christmas, people could not even withdraw their own money! Many participated in demonstrations, protests, and strikes, some ending in violence.

Everyone was affected. Some people lost everything and are living in the streets. Middle-class people cannot keep what they have inherited or achieved through decades of work. While I continue to receive a salary—now worth a third of what it was in December—many around me are daily deprived of what is due to them.

Overwhelmed by so much misery, many people retreated into private concerns: the computer, family, sleeping, and eating. In December it was quite clear that people did not have any spirit for meeting with extended family or friends, for worshiping, or for celebrating Christmas.

Argentinian Christians have come forth to remind people that there is a richer treasure than

what the banks have lost. They are responding to the inner voice that urges them to proclaim God's love and care, and to lend a hand wherever they can.

Most people reacted to the crisis only when their own pocket was touched. Too many still focus on their own situation while others starve, commit suicide, lose their sense of reality, or lose their faith.

I see God in the chaos when I see solidarity growing between people, regardless of church affiliation: with the next-door neighbor whose pension is too little to last through the month, with a cousin who lost her job last week, with people living in the streets and eating from garbage cans. I see it too when people overcome social, racial, or religious prejudices to speak up against a system that will, in the end, eat up everybody—those in the United States, too.

Finally, I see God's hand when the churches proclaim that a person's worth is not determined by his or her salary. This does not diminish what has happened here, but I do think we must not let political decisions directed by the market and corruption determine what is in our minds, our hearts, and our prayers. Witness to the kingdom of God is ours, the people of God.

Mercedes García Bachmann is an ordained pastor of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay. She teaches at ISEDET, an ecumenical school of theology in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and at the University of Buenos Aires.



Grace Notes

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

As of August 1, 2002, Linda Post Bushkofsky stepped into the role of executive director of Women of the ELCA. Here, Linda gives a brief history of her involvement with the women's organization and shares some of her hopes and dreams. As you will see, her experiences are richly steeped in the organization from the grass roots level on up to the latest challenge she has recently accepted. We extend a heartfelt welcome to Linda, and we are pleased to bring you her thoughts regularly through this column. —the editors

I was 25 and just out of graduate school when I first became involved in the women's organization of the Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church Women.

On my own and new in town, I found a home with the women of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Whitehall, Pennsylvania. We met for studies, we joined in service projects, we danced and sang and shared meals. These women became my sisters, women in their 20s all the way up into their 80s. They nurtured my faith, challenged my assumptions, and provoked my conscience.

When I was 30 and newly married, I attended the 1990 Triennial of Women of the ELCA, in Anaheim, California. A recipient of a young woman's scholarship, I simply soaked in the glory and grace of so many Christian women gathered in one place,

praising God, doing good works, and dancing in a conga line! Again, it seemed like a homecoming for me, with the notion of home being enlarged to include an entire country and 64 synodical women's organizations. I was hooked.

Upon returning home, I was promptly elected to the board of my synodical women's organization. I became the peace with justice coordinator. I wrote a couple articles for *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine and later became a regular columnist. I attended many Mission: Action training events. I helped plan conventions and led workshops. As my involvement in the organization grew, the women of the church continued to nurture my faith, challenge my assumptions, and provoke my conscience.

Now at 43, I have been called to serve the organization that helped shape the woman I am today. To this call I bring 18 years of experience as a lawyer and as a church communicator. Perhaps most importantly,

I bring 18 years of experience within the life of the women's organization. I am at home in this place, and yet I may not quite fit the popular image of a "church lady." True, I am married to a pastor, have taught Sunday school, play the piano and am an avid quilter. However, I also know all the words to "I Am Woman" (a song that Helen Reddy made popular in the '70s), I am a professional working on a second advanced degree, and also someone who turns to Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich for inspiration. What's so great about this women's organization is that it is a place for all women of the church, not just those who fit the popular image of a "church lady."

In three different decades and over several different stages of my life, the women's organization has been an important partner as I live out my baptismal call. Surely that's true for many readers of *Lutheran Woman Today* as well. Here is my challenge for each of you: Find a woman in your congregation—from the newly confirmed to the aging saints—and tell her what the women's organization has meant to you. Then invite her to an upcoming Women of the ELCA event.

Some may think that the women's organization is an anachronism in the 21st century. After all, we have moved well beyond the traditional roles of

women within the church and now serve as committee chairs, council members, pastors, bishops, and seminary professors. Nonetheless, women—whether they are stay-at-home moms, business executives, or public servants—still reach out to one another around issues of faith and spirituality. Some women gather around a quilt, some over lattes, and still others while jogging. Individually and collectively, the women who gather in these groups open themselves emotionally to one another, growing and becoming stronger disciples because of it. When in the com-

pany of women, we gain insight and inspiration.

In some places the women's organization is a well-kept secret, and we need to work intentionally to share the vision and mission of the organization so that all women of the church might be invited in to find in Women of the ELCA a meaningful, relevant, and vital community for all women of the church.

I am eager to spend time with you, getting to know the needs of your congregational units and how the churchwide staff might serve as ministry partners with and as resources for you as you

carry out your baptismal calls. I invite you to share your ideas and concerns with me by letters, email, or postings on the Women of the ELCA WebBoard.



What's so great about this women's organization is that it is a place for all women of the church, not just for those who fit the popular image of a "church lady."



AMEN!

Taming the Chaos

by Catherine Malotky

OUR FOREBEARS CALLED IT THE LEVIATHAN.

It dwelled in the ocean depths, deep in the unknown. Like so many of our kind, our forebears knew that to survive they needed to control their world. And they knew that in the depths of the seas they would be lost. There, they imagined, chaos reigned supreme.

I, too, yearn to control my world. I fear drunken drivers, road rage, freak accidents, pernicious disease, Alzheimer's. These things I cannot plan for. These things I cannot control.

I remember the fear I felt at dawn on September 12. The distant drone of jet engines awakened me. The airports are shut down, I thought; I shouldn't be hearing this. What now? Then I remembered the patrols, circling above, watching for more terror from the sky. We had come face to face with the leviathan, and for many of us, the chaos had just begun.

O God, you fashioned order out of chaos with but a word. You divided the waters and raised up the land so we would have some safe place to order ourselves in the small ways we are able. But still, great Creator, the leviathan swims in the deep. We have ordered much, but earth still crushes us, fire still burns, and the waters still drown. And sometimes, even in our careful ordering, we launch a chaos we could hardly imagine.

I confess, merciful God, my prejudices. I seek to order my world by understanding some to be better,

even more valuable, than others. I am not alone. And so racial chaos steals from me and all of us. In my attempt to understand, I exclude and demean.

I confess, merciful God, my shortsightedness. I seek comfort and security, and in so doing, I wreak havoc on your world.

I confess, merciful God, my distrust of you. I am even afraid that you will not provide for me as you have promised. I neglect my gifts, given by you. I am afraid to give, lest I be depleted. I am afraid not to give, lest I be abandoned.

Gracious God, tame the chaos of my life. Teach me to trust your power over the leviathan. In baptism, you teach me that I can float—not escaping the waters, but living with them. In baptism, you teach me that water is for life, not for just the chaos of the deep: You wash me, slake my thirst, and welcome me as my mother did, wet from her womb.

Creator God, merciful God, gracious God, I am yours. Bear me, as you have promised, into a life I cannot control but which you fashion for us all. Forgive me, as you have promised, the ways I feed the leviathan. Draw me out of the deep, as you have promised in Christ, thirst quenched, as co-creator, your servant.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher and parish pastor.

READER CALL TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or email to LWT Editorial Office

January/February 2003

In a few words, share your hopes for the new year.

Due September 10, 2002

March 2003

Does your congregation have foot-washings or a "foot night" for the homeless in the community? In a few words, tell us how this act is cleansing to you.

Due November 10, 2002

April 2003

When have you had to remind yourself that you are a "child of God"?

Due December 10, 2002

IDEANET TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Use the enclosed card or email IdeaNet@elca.org

January/February 2003

Prayer partners: How can you start such a program in your congregations? Share what has worked for you.

Due September 10, 2002

March 2003

Has your congregation ever participated in foot-washing? What thoughts would you offer to other congregations who are interested in beginning such a practice in their church? Share what works and other helpful tips to get started.

Due November 10, 2002

April 2003

Does your congregation or women's group lift up the accomplishments of younger members who are perhaps athletes, artists, or performers? How does your group interact with or support local students?

Due December 10, 2002

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE

Change of address, problems related to your subscription, and subscription orders must be addressed to our publisher, Augsburg Fortress.

Please do not contact the editorial office for subscription matters.

LWT Subscription Order Center

Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209

800-426-0115, ext. 639

subscriptions@augburgfortress.org

Audiotape and Braille Editions

800-426-0115, ext. 502

Audiotape edition for the visually impaired is available through ELCA Braille and Tape Ministry for \$11.50 per year.

Permission to Reprint Articles

800-421-0239 copyright@augburgfortress.org

Bible Study Resource Orders

Bible Study Leader Guides, etc.

800-328-4648 www.augburgfortress.org

Bible Study Leaders Online Discussion

webboard.elca.org:8080/~woboard

Women of the ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189

800-638-3522, ext. 2730

womnelca@elca.org www.elca.org/wo

LWT Editorial Office

For editorial feedback, magazine promotion questions, or freelance submissions, write:

LWT Editorial Office, Women of the ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189

800-638-3522, ext. 2743

lwt@elca.org www.elca.org/wo/lwt

The Language of the Heart

Sometimes the words

Seem so heavy

In this language

Of the earth,

This language

Spoken tongues,

That we doubt

Our prayers

Rise to be heard.

But if we pray

In the language

Of the heart,


The quiet tongue

Of the soul,

Our words

Will have wings.

K.S. Hardy

the magazine of Women ^{of the} ELCA 

#BXBLBU *****AUTO***3-DIGIT 947

#008116291#0305 LWT29M 2A 21

GRADUATE THEOL UNION

072

LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT

088

2400 RIDGE RD

888

BERKELEY CA 94709-1212

|||||